

## SOCIETY MEETING OF APRIL, 15, 1987

*Myrmecocystus mexicanus hortideorum* was the featured species in Dr. John Conway's illustrated talk, "The Biology of the Honey Ants," at the final membership meeting of the 1986-87 season. Dr. Conway, an Associate Professor of Biology at the University of Scranton, Pennsylvania, has devoted much of his professional career to studying and popularizing honey ants. He clearly has been successful considering that several among the 12 members and 10 guests realized at the meeting that their familiarity with honey ants had come from one of Dr. Conway's many articles in various science journals, e.g. *Am. Biol. Teacher* 48: 335-343 (1986).

In a casual walk along the ridges in the suburbs of Colorado Springs, the presence of occasional volcano-shaped ant hills with no daytime activity around them would attract little attention. Yet beneath these inconspicuous mounds lie colonies of fascinating honey ants. Hanging from the ceilings of many subterranean chambers are repletes, helpless members of the colony which store large quantities of nutrients for the colony in their crops and have enormously distended abdomens. The queen lives in the lowest chamber well over a meter below ground level. In the evening workers emerge to scavenge for dead insects, nectar, and plant exudates. They in turn feed the repletes that account for about a quarter of the 5000-member colony. Once a year in late July young winged queens and males emerge, mate in flight, and disperse to found new colonies.

Dr. Conway reported that honey ants have a taste like cane molasses provided the formic acid-containing parts are not eaten. The amount of work required to exhume these ants make it unlikely they will ever become a delicacy except to occasional badgers or coyotes. Interestingly honey ants have also evolved independently halfway around the world in Australia. Dr. Conway will be leading an Earthwatch trip to study these apparent examples of convergent evolution to understand the selective pressures that led to their peculiar specialization.

Among the people attending the meeting at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia was the Society's newest member, Margot Livingston, an eighth grade student from Moorestown, New Jersey. Margot was honored as the first recipient of the Calvert Prize, a newly established award of the Society to be given on an annual basis to a young entomologist in the Delaware Valley. Margot was given membership in the Society and in the Young Entomologists' Society for her outstanding science project, "Effects of Gypsy Moth Spraying on the Eastern Black Swallowtail Butterfly." Roger Fuester, President of the Society, also presented Miss Livingston with a \$25 check for entomological books and supplies.

Harold B. White  
Corresponding Secretary

Ed. note: Dr. Conway's Earthwatch trips to study Australian honey ants are scheduled for July 12-26, July 28-Aug. 11, and Aug. 13-27, 1987. Earthwatch needs paying volunteers to help with field work. Interested persons should contact Earthwatch, 680 Mt. Auburn St., Box 403, Watertown, Mass. 02272.